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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a program which involves the recruitment and training of college students as counselor-aides in elementary schools. The function of the counselor-aides is to provide the necessary screening, testing and preliminary follow-up contact to facilitate the work of the professional staff. Some of the general goals for the counselor-aides were those of being a friend to the student, assuring maximum attendance of students and facilitating communication between home and school. Described are the training format, specific duties of the counselor-aides, evaluation of the training and subsequent performance of the counselor-aides and an evaluation of the program itself. (SJL)

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PARA - PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR - AIDES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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PARA-PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR AIDES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

In 1972 a plan was devised by the Glendale Elementary School District to more effectively utilize authorized funds to reach more students. This plan involved the recruitment and training of college students as counselor-aides to work cooperatively with the already established staff of the Student Personnel Services Department. Funding for the actual training program was obtained through ESEA Title III. Funds for the salaries of the six aides, which was equivalent to the salary of one counselor, was provided by the district.

The function of the counselor-aides was to provide the necessary screening, testing and preliminary follow-up contact to facilitate the work of the professional staff.

In order to obtain aides with maximum interest in eventual professional services in counselor related fields, the decision was made to recruit students from local colleges and universities. Experience has now shown, with an occasional exception, that the hoped for motivation and specific interests in working with children was obtained.

The recruitment of aides was generally facilitated by cooperation of local community college staffs.

Our experience has been that undergraduates have the youth, flexibility and interests which has made them effective in working with children. In hiring, basically the same precautions were used as in hiring teachers or other professional staff.

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This program was partially funded by ESEA Title III and was directed by Lewis H. McCain of the Counseling Department of the Glendale Elementary Schools.

In June 1975 the program received National Validation and in December 1975 the program received the Excellence In Education Award from the National Association of State Advisory Council Chairmen. Classes on the program have been taught at both graduate and undergraduate level.

Because of the high degree of responsibility to the staff psychologist and counselor, each prospective aide was interviewed by the Project Director. In addition, the aide was interviewed by the unit principal to whom he would be administratively responsible thereby establishing a commitment to the school unit. Experience has shown that failure to fully involve the unit principal in the selection process can bring about a breakdown in communication and effective counselor-aide functioning. In general, when the unit principal has been fully involved in the selection process rapport has been established which has carried through the staff ranks. This rapport has also helped soften some of the divided loyalty, resulting from the aide's dual commitment to SPS for training and supervision and to the school unit for assignment of one's duties and responsibilities.

Definitions of functions of the counselor-aides evolved pragmatically from a synthesis of traditional elementary school counselor roles and input from the administrative and Student Personnel Services staff. Essentially the overall view of function involved enhancing the counselor-psychologist functions through screening referrals as they come from the teacher.

To this end a "Referral and Evaluation Report" was developed reflecting the instruments to be used by the aide.

Some of the general goals for the counselor-aide were those of being a friend to the student, assuring maximum attendance of students and facilitating communication between home and school.

Specific duties of the counselor-aides were defined within the overall definitions cited above as well as some optional duties as suggested by the unit principals and assigned according to unique needs at each school unit.

The aide was administratively assigned to Student Personnel Service but worked at a school unit and therefore was responsible to the principal at that unit while carrying out his duties. He was charged with administration of basic psycho-educational tests considered within the routine or traditional educational functions of the public school. Thus, he can give basic tests which are available to professionals within the education and closely related fields (such as school social work) but cannot administer tests requiring professional certification of a psychologist, counselor or psychometrist (such as WISC and Stanford-Binet). Administrative policy has also not required parental signature of administration of these tests. Among the tests classified would be the Slosson Intelligence Test, the Goodenough Draw A Man, Bender-Visual-Motor, Gestalt-Kippitz Scale and individually administered achievement tests such as the Wide Range Achievement Test and the Slosson Oral Reading Test. In addition, assistance with attendance work and conferences with students, teachers, administration and families (under Student Personnel Services staff supervision) were included among basic responsibilities. Optional functions, at the discretion of the unit principal, included assistance with teachers' duties, giving make-up achievement tests, home visits, tutoring, review of special education placements (under administrative supervision), helping with pupil registration and planning of evening field trips for disadvantaged children. Experience has shown that only limited time can be spent in any one of these supplemental duties because of the immediate need for assistance with referral processes. However, there

has been sufficient flexibility to allow some enhancement of the role as suggested by the unit administrators. Some of the aides have, therefore, been able to supplement the basic functions along lines compatible with their interests and skill and specific felt needs at certain schools.

Goals for training were established to facilitate the development of skills necessary for achievement of the functions defined for the counselor-aides. Essentially, training procedures were divided into three areas, although each area overlapped because of the nature of the work involved. The major areas included development of interviewing and related listening skills, proficiency in administering, scoring and interpretation of basic tests (Slosson Intelligence, Slosson Oral Reading, Wide Range Achievement, Bender-Visual-Motor, Gestalt) and communication of findings and recommendations to the appropriate staff personnel. Supervision by staff, inservice workshops, led by consultants from the community, test manual and related references, demonstrations and video taped materials were all employed in the training of aides.

In addition to the initial training, Friday afternoon training sessions were held on a weekly basis. These on-going sessions focused on practical aspects of the on-the-job experience of the aides, plus instruction on techniques of interviewing, testing evaluation and communication with school, staff, students and community.

Skills in interviewing were taught with the use of Glasser's Reality Therapy as the basic approach. In addition, techniques involving the use of attention and "active listening" (Thomas Gordon) were employed. Glasser's techniques were taught with the aid of a programmed manual, written by F. A. Mathis, Jr. For the

second year of the program it was decided to adapt portions of the "Micro-counseling" technique, as developed by Alan Ivey and used at the Colorado State University Counseling Center. Portions of A Microcounseling Training Manual, by Sharon L. Reed and Gary Richardson of Colorado State University have been incorporated into the Counselor-Aide Training Manual.

Glasser's Reality Therapy has some elements of Gordon's active listening but has an emphasis on the client's responsibility; responsibility for his own behavior and for keeping the commitment made to the counselor or therapist.

For the school year 1974-75 the counselor-aide program was extended to include screening children for possible placement in specific learning disability programs or special education classes. Also included in the program was initial screening in the area of speech, language, vision, hearing and height and weight measurements. To insure that adequate training was received by the aides, nine days were reserved prior to the start of screening for that purpose.

Two methods of evaluating the aides' comprehension and utilization of his training were used. One method was to select students known to have a specific problem along with students known not to have a problem in that area and have the aides distinguish between them. The other method was to have the aides score test information on file and compare his findings with the school psychologist, counselor or other competent person. If the aide should fail, he was required to go back through that part of the training dealing with the area in which he was weak. Under no condition was the aide permitted to go on until he could accurately give and score tests.

Prior to the beginning of testing, all school personnel were made fully aware of what we planned to do since a program of this nature affected almost

the entire school staff. We found that general meetings with the teaching staff and group meetings with special teachers and the nursing staff seemed to work well.

Probably the greatest problem was one of finding adequate facilities to be used for a testing center.

Prior to starting testing, a schedule was worked out with the unit principal regarding the order that the rooms were to be tested. Also provisions were made to have adequate personnel to act as runners and to monitor the movement from one testing area to the next. For this purpose, parent volunteers were found to be very helpful. Parents were also used to take the height and weight measurements thus freeing the counselor-aides to do the hearing, speech, and vision screening.

For full utilization of time the teachers were asked to schedule recesses around the time that their room was scheduled to be tested. We found by doing it this way, it was possible to save an hour per day.

One aide for each testing area was selected who was responsible for facilitating the movement of students through his area and to insure adequate supplies.

The actual screening was accomplished in two phases. In Phase I the students were screened for handicaps in the areas of speech, language, voice and rate. Of the total enrollment of 7,200, 6,917 students were screened and the absentees were referred to the appropriate professional staff member for follow-up screening.

For Phase II only students identified by homeroom teachers were screened. These students were screened for learning disabilities, low I.Q. and achievement in reading. 501 students were referred for this phase. All 501 were, with the assistance of a bi-lingual aide, given the entire battery of tests (with the

exception of eight students who could not read or speak English who were not given the reading test). All students identified as needing more indepth testing were referred on to the psychologist prior to placement in a Special Education class as required by law.

By utilizing twelve aides, the total screening was accomplished in 23 1/2 five hour days or a total of 1551 hours. In that time a total of 50,337 measurements were made (height and weight included) with an average time of 1.85 minutes per measurement.

During the first year of the project a total of seven counselor-aides were employed; six of which participated in the development of the model. The seven counselor-aides handled a total of 305 referrals during the year for an average of 43.57 referrals per counselor-aide. This number of referrals far exceeds the number of referrals which could be handled by a single counselor. Teacher comments suggested they liked the short period of time in which referrals were handled and the fact that the counselor-aide was more readily available to receive referrals.

Principal's responses to a questionnaire regarding the counselor-aides indicated that the aides performed duties outlined in the job description, and many performed duties in addition to those listed. Generally, the principals expressed satisfaction with the interns and the jobs they performed.

Consultants/trainers were utilized in training the counselor-aides in various aspects of counseling. Generally, the consultant/trainers were rated by the counselor-aides as good. Several (4) were rated as excellent and seven (7) were rated as good. Only one (1) consultant/trainer was considered by the counselor-aides to be average. The counselor-aides rated the relevance of the consultant/trainer presentations as good or excellent.

The counselor-aides were evaluated on promptness, reliability, attitude, competence, and dress habit. Five of the six counselor-aides were rated (overall) above average. A single counselor-aide was rated as average. The counselor-aides performed in a manner which reflected favorably upon the project in general and upon the selection procedures specifically.

During the second year of the project a total of twelve (12) counselor-aides were involved in the project. These counselor-aides rated their training program as excellent and found the training to be very relevant to the activities of the project.

Pre and post tests were administered at the beginning and conclusion of the training program. Eleven counselor-aides (one was absent when the pre test was administered) averaged 38.1% on the pre test and increased appreciably to an average of 79.1% on the post test. This represents an average increase of 41%. The results indicated an increase in knowledge relative to the ingredients of the program on the part of the counselor-aides.

In phase I, students were given the initial screening in the area of hearing, speech, language, voice and rate. There were 6917 (95.1% of total enrollment) screened with the following results:

Hearing	# Failed = 1458 or 78.93% passed
Speech	# Failed = 1364 or 80.29% passed
Language	# Failed = 1459 or 78.91% passed
Voice	# Failed = 487 or 92.96% passed
Rate	# Failed = 80 or 98.85% passed

The only information available for comparison was for hearing. The approximate county figure for initial screening was 75% passed.

For Phase II, 501 students were administered I.Q. tests and 493 were administered reading achievement tests.

Of the 501 students taking the I.Q. Test, 60 students scored 75 or below which represents .83% of the total school enrollment. 137 students scored

between 76 and 89. This figure represents 1.88% of total enrollment. The above figure does not include the students currently enrolled in special education classes.

Of the 493 students who were administered reading achievement tests, 155 (31.4%) were found to be achieving one year or more below the grade placement suggested by their mental age for grades K - 4, and two or more years below indicated grade level for grades 5 - 8. This figure, again, does not include students presently enrolled in special education classes nor does it include 8 students not tested due to language difficulties.

Not all teachers responded to the request for referrals for Phase II screening and as a result it was necessary to take an average of all home room teachers and estimate the percentage of children needing further attention. The estimation based on actual grade placement was 3.37%; based on chronological age, 4.74%; and based on mental age, 3.53%. These estimations and more detailed statistics for all schools and the district may be found in the Summary of Screening Phase I, II report available from the Glendale Elementary School District #40.

In June of 1975 a team of trained evaluators made an on-site investigation of the training portion of this project. Their findings were favorable and as a result the Counselor-Aide Training Program received validation for nation wide dissemination.